

Getting Technical with TV&C...

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Supplemental Applications

Introduction

This monograph will provide an introduction into the principles associated with the development and use of supplemental applications. Supplemental applications are known by several names, including evaluations of training and experience (T&Es), evaluations of education and experience (E&Es), and scored applications. Regardless of terminology, supplemental applications are a type of “unassembled” selection instrument. As such, candidates are not required to present themselves in person at a predetermined time and place to participate in the selection process but, rather, are permitted to complete the selection instrument away from the employer’s premises on their own time.

Supplemental applications are considered to be formal components in selection processes. The use of a supplemental application in a selection process should be based on its appropriateness to assess job-related qualifications (e.g., work experience, training, education, as well as knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)). Supplemental applications are typically used in three situations:

1. As the first hurdle in the selection process to determine which candidates will be accepted for more extensive testing.
2. For job classifications that attract few candidates and for which more extensive testing would not be cost-effective.
3. As the first hurdle in a selection process incorporating wide recruitment efforts such that candidates can not be brought together initially for the administration of an “assembled” selection instrument.

Supplemental Application Use

As with any selection procedure, the use of a supplemental application is appropriate in some situations and inappropriate in others. The use of a supplemental application may be appropriate when assessing the following:

- Academic degrees, certificates, licenses
 - Completion of specific academic and/or training courses
 - Experience in a particular occupation
 - Experience performing specific tasks
 - Possession of specific knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)
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The use of a supplemental application would be inappropriate when assessing the following:

- Intelligence
- Reasoning and analytical skills
- Numerical ability
- Reading comprehension
- Verbal communication
- Physical ability
- Psychomotor skills
- Personality characteristics

Legal Considerations

A supplemental application is considered to be a selection procedure under the provisions of the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* (29 CFR Part 1607). It is important to adhere to the *Uniform Guidelines* when developing and using a supplemental application. The content of the supplemental application, as well as the scoring criteria, must be *job-related* and based upon *job analysis data* for the job classification for which the supplemental application is being used.

Supplemental Application Formats

Supplemental application types can be divided into two main categories: narrative formats and point method formats. The **narrative format** is characterized by open-ended questions which require candidates to describe their qualifications as those qualifications relate to the requirements of the job classification for which the candidates are applying. The **point method format** utilizes a self-rating approach in which the requirements of the job classification are listed, and candidates use one or more rating scales to indicate their possession of or level of proficiency with the requirements of the job.

Narrative Formats. These methods focus on the *quality*, as well as *quantity*, of a candidate's experience or training.

1. **Behavioral Consistency Method.** The behavioral consistency method is used to obtain information regarding the candidates' experience and most significant accomplishments relative to five to ten critical duties or work behaviors of the job classification. Scoring criteria that incorporate the use of rating scales anchored to benchmark answers are developed for each of the critical duties or behaviors for which the candidates detail their experience. This supplemental application format has been shown to be the *most* valid and reliable of all of the supplemental application formats.
2. **Grouping Method.** The grouping method is used to obtain information regarding the candidates' experience performing essential tasks or functions of the job classification. Scoring criteria utilizing benchmark answers for each of the tasks/functions are developed to evaluate each candidate's qualifications. Typically, this method is used to *group* candidates into a small number of categories utilizing the benchmark delineations (e.g., Well Qualified, Qualified, Not Qualified).

Point Method Formats. These methods generally focus almost exclusively on the *quantity* of a candidate's experience or training.

1. **Traditional Point Method.** The traditional point method focuses on the work experience, training, and education requirements of the job classification. The supplemental application is comprised of a series of detailed statements describing the specific work
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experience, training, and/or education requirements of the job classification. Candidates use one or more rating scales to indicate their possession of each of the experience, training, and/or education requirements of the job. Point values, corresponding to the amount of experience, training, and/or education that a candidate possesses, are assigned to the rating scale(s). The value of each of the candidate's ratings is then totaled to generate the candidate's total score on the supplemental application. With this method, the greater the *amount* of experience, training, and/or education that a candidate possesses, or claims to possess, the higher his/her score.

2. Task-Based Method. The task-based method is an extension of the traditional point method and focuses on the *critical tasks* of the job classification. The supplemental application is comprised of a comprehensive list of the critical tasks of the job classification. Candidates rate their level and/or amount of experience performing each task in the same manner as with the traditional point method described above. This method is appropriate when previous task performance is important to job success.
3. KSA-Based Method. The KSA-based method is another extension of the traditional point method and focuses on the *important KSAs* required for successful job performance. The supplemental application is comprised of a comprehensive list of the important KSA requirements of the job. Candidates rate their possession of these KSAs in the same manner as with the traditional point method described in #1 above. This method is appropriate when possession of KSAs, rather than actual experience, is important to job success.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Supplemental applications offer several advantages over other selection procedures; however, supplemental applications do have some limitations. The advantages and disadvantages of supplemental applications should be taken into consideration in determining whether the use of a supplemental application is appropriate in the selection process.

Advantages of Narrative Formats.

Narrative supplemental applications:

- can be developed relatively quickly.
- take advantage of the unassembled examination approach.
- can provide high-quality, comprehensive information pertaining to the *quality and quantity* of candidate qualifications.

Disadvantages of Narrative Formats.

- Narrative supplemental applications are limited by the types of questions that can be included (e.g., previous experience, training, education).
- With the use of narrative supplemental applications, written communication skills become a factor in how well the supplemental application is completed.
- Narrative supplemental applications utilize a subjective scoring system; thus, the reliability of instruments could be diminished. (To ensure reliable ratings, it is necessary to provide rater training prior to the scoring of the supplemental applications.)

Advantages of Point Method Formats.

Point method supplemental applications:

- can be developed quickly.
 - take advantage of the unassembled examination approach.
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- can utilize a scannable answer sheet, which provides for relatively quick and inexpensive scoring.
- can be accessed and returned by the candidate via the Internet.
- typically require minimal time to complete by the candidate.

Disadvantages of Point Method Formats.

- Point method supplemental applications often have very low validity; consequently, they tend to be very poor predictors of job success.
- Depth and breadth of experience is difficult to assess.
- Exaggeration of qualifications and inflated self-ratings are serious problems that often occur with the use of point method formats. Since these problems will result in candidate scores which are not indicative of the candidates' job-related qualifications, it is difficult to make sound hiring decisions on the basis of point method evaluations.

Developing a Supplemental Application

Regardless of which supplemental application format is used, the supplemental application and scoring criteria should be developed based upon job analysis data and input from subject matter experts (SMEs). When developing a supplemental application, and the corresponding scoring criteria, the following issues should be addressed:

1. The decision to use a supplemental application should be based upon a job-related rationale, in conformance with sound testing principles.

2. The decision of how a supplemental application will be used (e.g., to identify the best qualified candidates, to screen out those candidates not qualified) should be made during examination planning activities.
3. The supplemental application should not be so lengthy or cumbersome so as to discourage well-qualified candidates from completing it.
4. Trivial questions which will not help in evaluating the candidates' job-related qualifications should be avoided.
5. Questions for which answers can be obtained from a textbook or by speaking with others should be avoided.

Setting Pass Points

As with other selection procedures, it is necessary to establish *job-related* pass points for supplemental applications. When using a narrative supplemental application, the anchored benchmark answers and corresponding rating scale(s) are used in establishing the pass point. When using a point method supplemental application, a pass point setting method which incorporates SME input (e.g., certified group method, a minimal acceptable competency technique) is utilized.

Conclusion

As with any selection instrument, it is imperative that the decision to use a supplemental application based on sound selection principles rather than factors such as increased speed, reduced costs, or minimized subject matter expert input.



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